

Transcript of Interview of Vietnam War Veteran on His Role in Alleged Massacre of Civilians at Songmy

Following is a transcript of an interview with Paul Meadlo, Vietnam veteran, by Mike Wallace on the Columbia Broadcasting System Radio Network last night:

MEADLO: Captain Medina had us all in a group, and oh, he briefed us, and I can't remember all the briefing.

WALLACE: How many of them were you? A. Well, with the mortar platoon, I'd say there'd be about 65—65 people, but the mortar platoon wasn't with us. And I'd say the mortar platoon had about 20—25—about 25 people in the mortar platoon. So we didn't have the whole company in the Pinkville, no we didn't.

Q. There weren't about 40-45—A. . . . right. . . .

Q.—that took part in all of this? A. Right.

Q. Now you took off from your base camp—A. . . . yes. —Dolly.

Q. . . . Dolly. At what time? A. I wouldn't know what time it was. . . .

Q. . . . in the early morning. . . . A. . . . In the early morning. It was—it would have been a long time ago.

Q. And what had you been briefed to do when you got to Pinkville?

A. To search and to make sure that there weren't no N.V.A. in the village and expecting to fight—when we got there. . . .

Q. To expect to fight? A. To expect to fight.

Q. Uh-huh. So you took off and—in how many choppers?

A. Well, I'd say the first wave was about four of us—I mean four choppers, and. . . .

Q. How many men aboard each chopper?

A. Five of us. And we landed next to the village, and we all got on line and we started walking toward the village. And there was one man, one gook in the shelter, and he was all huddled up down in there, and the man called out and said there's a gook over here.

Q. How old a man was this? I mean was this a fighting man or an older man? A. An older man. And the man hauled out and said that there's a gook over here, and then Sergeant Mitchell hollered back and said shoot him.

Q. Sergeant Mitchell was in charge of the 20 of you? A. He was in charge of the whole squad. And so then the man shot him. So we moved on into the village, and we started searching up the village and gathering people and running through the center of the village.

Q. How many people did you round up? A. Well, there was about 40-45 people that we gathered in the center of the village. And we placed them in there, and it was like a little island, right there in the center of the village, I'd say. And—

Q. What kind of people—men, women, children? A. Men, women, children. —"I Want Them Dead"

Q. Babies?

A. Babies. And we all huddled them up. We made them squat down, and Lieutenant Calley came over and said, you know what to do with them, don't you? And I said Yes. So I took it for

granted that he just wanted us to watch them. And he left, and came back about 10 or 15 minutes later, and said, how come you ain't killed them yet? And I told him that I didn't think you wanted us to kill them, that you just wanted us to guard them. He said, no, I want them dead. So—

Q. He told this to all of you, or to you particularly?

A. Well, I was facing him. So, but the other three, four guys heard it and so he stepped back about 10, 15 feet, and he started shooting them. And he told me to start shooting. So I started shooting, I poured about four clips into the group.

Q. You fired four clips from your. . . A. M-16.

Q. And that's about—how many clips—I mean how many—A. I carried seventeen rounds to each clip.

Q. So you fired something like 67 shots—A. Right.

Q. And you killed how many? At that time?

A. Well, I fired them on automatic, so you can't—you just spray the area on them and so you can't know how many you killed 'cause they were going fast. So I might have killed ten or fifteen of them.

Q. Men, women and children? A. Men, women and children.

Q. And babies? A. And babies.

Q. Okay, then what? A. So we started to gather them up, more people, and we had about seven or eight people, that we was gonna put into the hootch, and we dropped

a hand grenade in there with them.

Q. Now you're rounding up more?

A. We're rounding up more, and we had about seven or eight people. And we was going to throw them in the hootch, and well, we put them in the hootch and then we dropped a hand grenade down there with them. And somebody holed up in the ravine, and told us to bring them over to the ravine, so we took them back out, and led them over to—and by that time, we already had them over there, and they had about 70-75 people all gathered up. So we threw ours in with them and Lieutenant Calley told me, he said, Meadlo, we got another job to do. And so he walked over to the people, and he started pushing them off and started shooting. . . .

Q. Started pushing them off into the ravine?

A. Off into the ravine. It was a ditch. And so we started pushing them off and we started shooting them, so altogether we just pushed them all off, and just started using automatics on them. And then—

Q. Again—men, women, children? A. Men, women and children.

Q. And babies?

A. And babies. And so we started shooting them, and somebody told us to switch off to single shot so that we could save ammo. So we switched off to single shot, and shot a few more rounds. And after that, I just—we just—the company started

gathering up again. We started moving out, and we had a few gooks that was in—as we started moving out, we had gooks in front of us that was taking point, you know.

Q. Uh-huh. A. —and as we walked—

Q. Taking point. You mean out in front? To take any fire that might come.

Stepped on Land Mine

A. Right. And so we started walking across that field. And so later on that day, they picked them up, and gooks we had, and I reckon they took them to Chu Lai or some camp that they was questioning them, so I don't know what they done with them. So we set up [indistinct] the rest of the night, and the next morning we started leaving, leaving the perimeter, and I stepped on a land mine next day, next morning.

Q. And you came back to the United States. A. I came back to the United States, and lost a foot out of it.

Q. You feel—

A. I feel cheated because the V.A. cut my disability like they did, and they said that my stump is well healed, well padded, without tenderness. Well, it's well healed, but it's a long way from being well padded. And without tenderness? It hurts all the time. I got to work eight hours a day up on my foot, and at the end of the day I can't hardly stand it. But I gotta work because I gotta make a living. And the V.A. don't give me enough money to live on as it is.

Q. Veterans' Administration. A. Right. So—

Q. Did you feel any sense of retribution to yourself the day after? A. Well, I felt that I was punished for what I'd done, the next morning. Later on in that day, I felt like I was being punished.

Q. Why did you do it? A. Why did I do it? Because I felt like I was ordered to do it, and it seemed like that, at the time I felt like I was doing the right thing, because like I said I lost buddies. I lost a damn good buddy, Bobby Wilson, and it was on my conscience. So after I done it, I felt good, but later on that day, it was getting to me.

Q. You're married? A. Right.

Q. Children? A. Two.

Q. How old? A. The boy is two and a half, and the little girl is a year and a half.

Q. Obviously, the question comes to my mind. . . . the father of two little kids like that. . . . how can he shoot babies? A. I didn't have the little girl. I just had the little boy at the time.

Q. Uh-huh. How do you shoot babies? A. I don't know. It's just one of them things.

Q. How many people would you imagine were killed that day? A. I'd say about 370.

Q. How do you arrive at that figure? A. Just looking.

Q. You saw, you think, that many people, and you yourself were responsible for how many of them? A. I couldn't say.

Q. Twenty-five? Fifty? A. I couldn't say. . . . just too many.

Q. And how many men did

the actual shooting? A. Well, I really couldn't say that, either. There was other. . . . there was another platoon in there and. . . . but I just couldn't say how many.

Q. But these civilians were lined up and shot? They weren't killed by cross-fire? A. They weren't lined up. . . . they [were] just pushed in a ravine or just sitting, squatting. . . . and shot.

Q. What did these civilians—particularly the women and children, the old men—what did they do? What did they say to you? A. They weren't much saying to them. They [were] just being pushed and they were doing what they was told to do.

'It Was . . . Mostly Revenge'

Q. They weren't begging or saying, "No. . . . no," or—A. Right, they was begging and saying, "No, no." And the mothers was hugging their children and, but they kept right on firing. Well, we kept right on firing. They was waving their arms and begging. . . .

Q. Was that your most vivid memory of what you saw? A. Right.

Q. And nothing went through your mind or heart? A. Many a times. . . . many a times. . . .

Q. While you were doing it? A. Not while I was doing it. I just seemed like it was the natural thing to do at the time. I don't know. It just—I was getting relieved from what I'd seen earlier over there.

Q. What do you mean? A.

Well, I was getting. . . . like the. . . . my buddies getting killed or wounded or—we weren't getting no satisfaction from it, so what it really was, it was just mostly revenge.

Q. You call the Vietnamese "gooks?" A. Gooks.

Q. Are they people to you? Were they people to you?

A. Well, they were people. But it was just one of them words that we just picked up over there, you know. Just any word you pick up. That's what you call people, and that's what you been called.

Q. Obviously, the thought that goes through my mind—I spent some time over there, and I killed in the second war, and so forth. But the thought that goes through your mind is, we've raised such a dickens about what the Nazis did, or what the Japanese did, but particularly what the Nazis did in the second world war, the brutalization and so forth, you know. It's hard for a good many Americans to understand that young, capable, American boys could line up old men, women and children and babies and shoot them down in cold blood. How do you explain that?

A. I wouldn't know.

Q. Did you ever dream about all of this that went on in Pinkville? A. Yes, I did. . . . and I still dream about it.

Q. What kind of dreams? A. I see the women and children in my sleep. Some days. . . . some nights, I can't even sleep. I just lay there thinking about it.